

# STATE OF THE STATE OF EDUCATION

State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster

State Capitol

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Thank you, Tia Marie, for that wonderful introduction. Your presentation makes me believe you will be most successful this fall at UW-Madison.

I also would like to recognize and thank Paul Spraggins. Paul has given his heart and soul to the children of our state. The precollege program this past year served 3,500 students. Over the past 18 years, it reached more than 25,000 individuals.

Paul has served with honor and distinction under three state superintendents. Paul, your retirement from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) may bring your service to an end, but your legacy will continue in the hopes, dreams, and achievements of thousands of Wisconsin students.

Please join with me in recognizing Paul Spraggins.

It is truly an honor to be here today, in our beautiful State Capitol, to report to the people of Wisconsin on the State of the State of Education and to issue a call for action to local communities to pledge to a New Wisconsin Promise that ensures a future of quality education for all the children of our great state.

I am honored to serve as your State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The trust that was placed in me to serve in this important office has influenced and guided my actions in this first year.

I would like to recognize and thank a number of very important people in our state. Thank you to the students, parents, educators, librarians, bus drivers, administrators, principals, school board members, education support professionals, school psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors, child care providers, and nurses, custodians, volunteers; and food service and clerical workers who make up the PK-12 education system of Wisconsin. You are not thanked enough for the tremendous contribution you make to our communities and to the quality of life in our state.

And thank you to many members of the excellent staff at the Department of Public Instruction, our regional partners, the CESAs, and the many organizations in this state that support education. I want to thank these individuals for the tremendous commitment they demonstrate in serving the children and public schools and libraries of Wisconsin.

Wisconsin has a proud history of educational leadership and innovation. From our country's first kindergarten, to a number-one, nation-leading performance on college admission tests, to a truly world-class system of higher education and public libraries, our state has always prided itself on the quality of our educational system.

The people of Wisconsin have long understood public education as the foundation of our democracy and recognized the interdependence of strong public schools and libraries and healthy, productive communities.

The quality of life we have in Wisconsin and who we are today is a direct result of the investment made in us as children. Raising a family in Wisconsin has been built upon a promise of an opportunity for a quality education and the chance to get ahead if you work hard, do well in school, and are a responsible member of your community.

The history of Wisconsin communities is interwoven with the history of the country schools; the education of immigrant children; and, as we are here before a statue of reformer "Fighting Bob" La Follette, with the Wisconsin idea that we are here to serve and advance the public interest.

It is in that tradition of service in support of democracy that we see the obligation to ensure that every child receives a quality education. Public education can reverse the widening social stratification in our state and country. And, it is in the tradition of Bob La Follette that we must ensure that the next generation of children is educated to advance the public interest by living and serving in Wisconsin communities.

Central to our history of excellence in education has been our tradition of local control. Quality education in Wisconsin has long been the product of shared governance between the state, to which our constitution and state law give substantial responsibility, and local communities operating through their elected school boards.

Local control has been the heart and soul of strong Wisconsin communities. Yet, today, while many state and federal officials speak to the value of local control, local officials often have a different perspective. Local school board members and district administrators cite significant erosion of their ability to operate their school districts. Citizens say they must have more local control to keep the promise of educating all of the children of their community. And yet, what we are facing is federal legislation that is the most prescriptive in our history.

The No Child Left Behind Act offers an opportunity to engage in a collaborative process to ensure the empowerment of disadvantaged children and direct federal resources toward our neediest children. But, the act comes with a windfall of requirements and not a windfall of new money, so we must ensure it does not become an unfunded federal mandate for Wisconsin public schools.

While citizens throughout our state do not all agree with the provisions and requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, they do understand their history, their tradition of equity and investing in their children, and the promise of a bright future through quality education. Citizens of Wisconsin understand that the economic, social, and moral future of their communities will be determined by the next generation, by the goodness of their children and the greatness of their schools.

And so, with our new Wisconsin Promise, we will work with the federal law to close the achievement gap so that all Wisconsin children, regardless of the color of their skin, the languages they speak at home, or the economic or educational level of their parents, have the opportunity to become productive citizens. By returning to our progressive roots, by coming together in community around our shared value and responsibility to put our children and their education first, Wisconsin will lead the way in truly leaving no child behind.

Three weeks ago, I released this year's WKCE (Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination) test results. While pleased with many of the results, examination of student performance reveals that only 10 percent of African-American students performed at the advanced and proficient categories in science at the tenth-grade level, compared to 53 percent of white students. Only 42 percent of American Indian students performed at proficient and advanced in language arts, compared to 67 percent of white students. Only 15 percent of Latino students were proficient and advanced in math, compared to 48 percent of white students.

Those are just numbers. The real impact is what it means for the individual students comprising those numbers. For example, it may mean "Keisha" will not be able to enter the nursing program, because her science performance was not strong enough; "Andrew" will not be able to move into the broadcast career he anticipated, because his writing skills were weak; "Angela" will have to postpone her goal to be the first in her family to go to college, because she did not have the prerequisite math skills.

Time lost, dreams ended, economic security gone. This is unacceptable. Across all of the tested grades in all areas, the percentage of proficient and advanced students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds was significantly less than those from advantaged. While 80 percent of economically advantaged students were proficient and advanced in reading, only 51 percent of eighth graders of poverty performed at those high levels.

This achievement gap is unacceptable.

In communities across our state, we must have a shared sense of responsibility in addressing the adverse effects of poverty in the education of our children. Schools must build exciting, challenging programs that are creative and diverse in the way we teach children. The classroom of today is not what we had in the past and not what we will have in the future.

Now, more than ever, closing the achievement gap must become our number-one priority, the economic engine for ensuring long-term security for our state and for our citizens.

As your state superintendent, I have traveled from Superior to Stoughton, from Butternut to Beloit, listening, talking, sharing, and learning from the people of Wisconsin. In those travels, I have seen first hand how the children of Forest Home Avenue Elementary in Milwaukee, Keshena Primary in the Menominee Indian School District, and Lincoln Elementary in Appleton are benefiting from the focus on quality educators; early learning

opportunities, including four-year-old kindergarten; small class sizes; nutrition programs; an emphasis on reading; family literacy programs; and community learning centers that provide academic enrichment. These are the initiatives that are producing significant results in closing the achievement gap. And, I have heard first hand that these efforts must be sustained over a long period of time if we truly want to see results.

The “here today, gone tomorrow” reforms create a cycle of despair and disillusionment. Long-term investment in these priorities is needed. We can invest now, or we will invest later in social and corrections programs for our children as adults.

Now, more than ever, the future of our state rests with the present state of our children. We must pledge to the New Wisconsin Promise.

Ask Principal Patti Vickman, of Webster Stanley Elementary School in Oshkosh, about the power of reading. Webster Stanley Elementary has earned an exemplary reading program award from the International Reading Association. The reading program at Webster Stanley focuses on a balanced literacy approach, involves parents and the community, emphasizes reading throughout the curriculum, and provides meaningful, ongoing professional development for teachers.

Now, more than ever, reading is the fundamental skill that separates those children who succeed from those who struggle.

At Logan High School in La Crosse, creative solutions from parents, the school board, administrators, and teachers overcame barriers of socioeconomic stigma and class schedules to implement a breakfast program that has improved student engagement in learning.

Now, more than ever, we must look to the real reasons students of poverty are not succeeding academically. Breakfast builds a bright beginning; good nutrition improves a student’s behavior, attendance, and test scores.

Glidden, in Ashland County, struggles with the realities of rural poverty. The SAGE (Student Achievement Guarantee in Education) class-size reduction program ensures individual attention to students to support their educational success in the early grades. Third-grade reading test scores there improved from 50 percent to 85 percent proficient or advanced over the last five years.

Now, more than ever, our children need our attention to succeed.

Ask Sharon Willis, director of the Southport Singers in the Kenosha school district, how reading skills, memorization, public speaking, discipline, and self-confidence are enhanced for every student in her 64-member fourth- and fifth-grade choir.

Now, more than ever, our children need a broad curriculum and artistic experiences that promote problem solving and creative thinking.

As I traveled throughout the state, there was no question that school finance issues loom large in the minds of Wisconsin educators and citizens. From our smallest school district, Dover, to our largest, Milwaukee, communities care deeply about their children and their education. And across the state, local governments and school districts alike face enormous challenges in meeting their constituents’ needs in the face of rising costs, budget deficits, and stagnant revenues.

The budget repair bill did little to resolve the issues of affordability of the state’s two-thirds commitment, the impact of revenue caps and the QEO (quality economic offer), the effects of negative tertiary aid, the failure to adequately fund special education, and the new Wisconsin Supreme Court standard, to name a few.

Indeed, the question of how Wisconsin funds its public schools, serving 900,000 students in 426 school districts and all communities throughout the state, is vitally important. Too important, frankly, to answer without engaging citizens and determining the values they believe the school finance system should reflect.

That is why I conducted community dialogues on investing in quality education in nine communities around the state. I invited citizens from diverse backgrounds to serve on discussion panels and welcomed members of the public to share their views.

As I reflect on the intensity and passion of those discussions, I have never felt more proud to be a citizen of this great state. For Wisconsinites, the commitment to their communities, to preserving and enhancing the foundation of our democracy, runs very deep.

Wisconsin's citizens expect the values of student equity, quality education, and local control to be reflected in how we fund our public schools.

These values have been constant in our state's quest for strong public education. Let's return to them. Working against local control are the QEO and revenue caps. Both must be eliminated. Our local boards of education and local taxpayers must be given back their ability to make sound decisions to improve learning and to bargain collectively with their employees. Only when we eliminate these huge obstacles can we return to the basics: local people running local schools.

We can debate for the next millennium whether our current finance system is broken or not. The fact is, we have parts of our state where the ability to pay for a sound basic education has been decimated. In White Lake, Goodman-Armstrong, Butternut, Juda, and Laona, the taxpayers make a financial effort two times that of the rest of the state just to keep the school doors open. Our school finance system must address the needs of these smaller school districts.

During the community dialogues, the quality of education in Wisconsin was attributed to quality educators in our schools. Adequate funding to attract and retain qualified teachers is needed. The challenge for us now is to reform our school finance system so it reflects these values and lives up to the Supreme Court standard that defines a sound, basic education, equalizes opportunity regardless of property wealth, honors local control, and permits communities to provide a quality education to all of their children.

Now, more than ever, an investment in quality education today ensures our long-term economic security tomorrow.

I was a teacher and principal for 25 years, and nothing would have prepared me for the questions of our children in the aftermath of September 11. Children have been called the "truth tellers." They don't always tell the truth, but they listen for the truth.

We all know in our hearts and souls that these are tough times. We are seeing things we have never seen before. The truth is that the future is vulnerable and fragile, just as children are.

Now, more than ever, we must tell the truth to our children. And, the truth is, if they don't have the knowledge and skills to be productive citizens of a democracy, their future and our future is very bleak.

In tough times, priorities do matter. We must transcend the pressures of one-size-fits-all school reform and concentrate on those practices that have proven results.

In tough times, we must work together to create a future of hope.

The citizens of Wisconsin have sent the message loud and clear throughout our history that we believe in the power of education to create the future. And now, in these tough times, we must send a message loud and clear that education is our priority.

We know what works: Student achievement rests with a quality teacher in every classroom and a strong leader in every school.

Parker Palmer, author of "The Courage to Teach," has called teachers the culture heroes of our time. Daily, they are asked to solve problems that baffle us. Daily, they are asked to work with resources nowhere commensurate with the task. And, daily, they are berated by politicians, the public, and the press for their alleged failures and inadequacies.

If we are to ensure quality education, we must recruit and retain high-quality educators. We must move beyond the slogans to engage in the complexity of real problem solving related to the achievement gap, teacher and principal shortages, and professional development. We must continue to look to our outstanding professional organizations for research-based best practices in teaching and learning.

Through a Higher Education Act grant, the DPI brought together parents, school board representatives, and public and private school educators to create models to implement the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative, PI 34, the educator certification and licensing reform passed by the legislature. Public and private colleges and universities are being held to new standards in preparing educators, new teachers will be mentored by experienced teachers, and academic achievement becomes the focus for educator license renewal.

This year, the Wisconsin PK-16 Leadership Council, comprised of representatives from Wisconsin state government, PK-12 and higher education, professional associations, as well as business, labor, and industry, endorsed PI 34, which is a bold initiative to ensure rigor in preparing teachers. I ask communities to rally around this initiative and school districts to commit their new federal dollars toward quality educators as the foundation of higher student achievement.

Now, more than ever, a qualified educator can shape the future.

The New Wisconsin Promise ensures a finance system that provides access and equity to all students. In special education, we will pursue a number of initiatives at the federal and state levels.

- We will be adamant in our support for the inclusion of all students in accountability systems. We must focus on educational results, including performance on multiple assessments as well as other indicators, such as graduation, dropout rates, and suspensions.
- We must call on Congress to fulfill the promise they made 27 years ago to fund special education at the full 40 percent of average costs.
- Wisconsin must accept its own responsibility to honor student equity as a value and adequately fund the education needs of children with disabilities.
- Through the READS (Reading Evaluation and Demonstration of Success) research initiative, we have demonstrated that, with appropriate instruction in reading, children who were struggling can succeed and may not be labeled with a disability. We must persuade federal lawmakers to examine how we can provide services earlier, so all children succeed, and we are appropriately identifying students for special education.

Now, more than ever, we must ensure access to excellence for children with disabilities and not pit the funding of regular education against special education.

Every Wisconsin child must be proficient in reading. Every teacher is a teacher of reading. And, reading, writing, and comprehension skills must be taught throughout the curriculum.

The Wisconsin State Reading Association was honored with three coveted awards from the International Reading Association, recognizing their outstanding contribution to improving reading education in Wisconsin and throughout our country.

Wisconsin has applied for 11.1 million dollars in federal funding to improve reading performance in K-3 classrooms. The Reading First grant will provide instruction to close the achievement gap in reading.

The Milwaukee Partnership Academy is a PK-16 collaboration among the university, public schools, technical college, teachers' union, association of commerce, the Private Industry Council, the governor's office, and the DPI, all working to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in the Milwaukee public schools through a balanced literacy emphasis.

The state of Wisconsin must embrace the children of Milwaukee and recognize that the seeds of Wisconsin's future are planted today in the classrooms of Milwaukee.

We know what works. SAGE improves achievement by providing class sizes of 15 for K-3 pupils. SAGE has high expectations for all students and clear accountability for results. The documented success of SAGE has led to an expansion, from 30 schools in 1996 to 560 this past year.

SAGE has made a significant contribution to closing the achievement gap. In the original 30 SAGE schools, the percentage of students scoring as proficient or advanced on the state's third-grade reading test increased by 17 points between 1997 and 2001, compared to ten points for the state as a whole.

Five years of SAGE research by UW-Milwaukee has shown that students in small classes out perform similar students in non-SAGE classrooms in mathematics, reading, and language arts.

The DPI has contracted with the UW-Madison Wisconsin Center for Education Research to continue to study the long-term effects of class-size reduction. Do special education referrals decrease? Do the effects of reduced class size differ between the early and later grades? Is achievement sustained in later grades? This research can prove valuable to us as we evaluate and continue to improve the SAGE program.

Now, more than ever, we know what works. We must retain funding for SAGE. I commend the governor and the legislature for their support of SAGE and call upon them to again commit their support in the next biennial budget.

Why are we surprised that there is an achievement gap when the divide in our country between the haves and have nots has been growing for several decades? The gap exists before children come to school. Because of the socioeconomic gap, not all children come to school prepared to learn. The New Wisconsin Promise recognizes that the school cannot act alone, and community-based approaches are needed to expand early learning opportunities.

In the last few years, more Wisconsin school districts have begun offering early learning opportunities to four-year-old children in collaboration with their community partners. Wausau, La Crosse, and Milwaukee are examples of 4K programs that have seen exponential growth in access to services that promote the social and academic skills needed for school performance.

Now, more than ever before, research confirms that for every dollar invested in early childhood education, seven dollars is saved in later costs to society.

In addition to supporting lifelong learning, public libraries also play a unique role in serving as a doorway to early learning, a partner in promoting teen and adult literacy, and a resource to parents and other caregivers. Libraries are a vital resource to all of the institutions that provide formal educational opportunities to students.

The libraries of our state are an enormous educational, economic, and quality-of-life resource for our citizens. Wisconsin's public libraries and Wisconsin's public schools are partners in providing lifelong learning opportunities for our state's citizens. Just as a free public education is an integral part of our democratic society, so is free access to information through the public library. When people of all ages make use of the public library, our society as a whole benefits. It is good public policy to do everything possible to encourage both children and adults to use the library.

In February, the DPI, in cooperation with TEACH Wisconsin, implemented a program called REACH. Sixty-five libraries, mostly in rural areas, took advantage of this program. As a result, 92 percent of the state's 387 public libraries will now have direct, high-speed Internet access.

The DPI continues to enhance the BadgerLink program, which provides all residents of the state with Web access to over 6,000 publications, and to electronically connect different public libraries around the state.

Students need digital skills to live and work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ability to communicate information using technology has become critical. School library media specialists have a key role in transforming education to include technology as a teaching and learning tool.

At a time when state government is asking local governments to consolidate, the transfer of TEACH Wisconsin to DPI, as provided in the budget repair bill, provides an ideal opportunity for the state to lead by example. The cost savings and more complementary program delivery resulting from moving TEACH to DPI would benefit both the state budget and the PK-12 community we all serve.

Now, more than ever, our democracy depends on equal access to knowledge and technology.

The new economy embraces intellectual capital and technological innovation and is global in scope. Young people today want to be engaged in their learning. They want the "hands-on" experience of the real world. Ask students what they want. They will tell you. Last year, 17,000 technical college credits were earned by Wisconsin high school students through strong partnerships with the technical college system. We must expand the opportunities available in career and technical education.

Ask Robert Kern, founder and CEO of Generac Power Systems. The production technical youth apprenticeship piloted by Generac and the Mukwonago school-to-work consortium is not only a national education reform model but a corporate training model as well.

And, because of this alternative learning program, instead of dropping out of school, Noah, Joe, Nicholas, and Josh, whom I met this year, earned their high school diplomas and graduated with their peers.

These graduates acquired head skills as well as hand skills but not in the “sit-and-listen” way, which they sometimes called the “freezer method” of education, where knowledge is handed out to students, who are told to put it into their mental freezers until they can thaw it out later. Instead, they said they learn best by taking new information and applying it.

Research confirms the experience of Josh, Noah, Nick, and Joe and shows that students do learn best, are most interested, and reach higher levels of achievement when academic/technical subjects are taught in the context of how they are used in life and work.

The benefit to the businesses that participate in programs like Generac’s is not just the addition of extra workers but rather the development and implementation of a system to train an inexperienced workforce. Congratulations to this company and the many other companies throughout our state that have responded to the social conscience and moral imperative of a business to help transition the young people of the community to adulthood.

The best way to aggressively reduce high rates of truancy in our middle and high schools is to engage our students. Ask the hundreds of young people throughout our state who had given up, dropped out. They will tell you that nobody noticed, nobody cared, they weren’t any good at school.

But, ask students who have seen success as a result of participation in extracurricular activities, athletics, the arts, service learning, school-to-work, and apprenticeship programs, and they will tell you that working with adult mentors in school and community activities builds self-confidence and establishes a direct connection between education and individual economic security and citizenship.

Now, more than ever before, students must be engaged in their learning and see how it applies to the real world. The educational community must continue to develop respect and trust between families and schools.

Parents are the first and most important teachers of their children. The most effective schools are those where parents, teachers, and the community are all sending a consistent message to children of the value of doing well in school. And, as state superintendent, I convened a statewide Parent Leadership Corps, comprised of PTA and other parent leaders of diverse backgrounds, to share the best practices throughout our state in developing and enhancing parental and community involvement.

School becomes, for many, the safest, most secure, and most reliable place to be. Family, school, and community collaboration benefits all of our children. In Wisconsin, we have developed a strong foundation for community partnerships: Beginning in the early 1900s with MPS recreation director Dorothy Enderis, who began the “lighted schoolhouse” concept; to highly successful service-learning programs; to the 21<sup>st</sup> century community learning centers, where over 190 school buildings have participated in before- and after-school programs.

In the Milwaukee Public Schools’ 2002 Report to the Community, data demonstrated that a greater percentage of students in grades 2 through 8 who attended community learning centers achieved proficiency in reading, language arts, and math over their peers who did not attend community learning centers. Other results, such as fewer absences, rising grade-point averages, and a reduction in criminal activity in and around community learning centers are positively impacting students. These are the triumphs that are making this program a model for the entire country.

Now, more than ever, strong schools and strong communities are interdependent.

Leadership is never easy, not during the “good times” and certainly not in challenging times. We have to prioritize and make difficult choices. We must choose education, we must invest precious dollars, we must believe in young people and help them to grow. Today’s decisions are investments that return dividends tomorrow.

The state of the state of education in Wisconsin is strong, but our best and most important work is needed during the challenging times ahead.

By remembering our history, how we established a legacy of quality education throughout our state and prioritizing our efforts on our New Wisconsin Promise to close the achievement gap, together, we will, now, more than ever, shape the destiny of Wisconsin children and secure our future.